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DEPARTMENT FOR A/S FRIED  
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TAGS: PREL PM PL

SUBJECT: POLAND: ARE WE SINCERE?

Classified By: Ambassador Ashe by reasons 1.4 b and d

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Polish political leaders have largely recovered from initial misgivings about recent U.S. overtures to Russia. The President's public clarification of his letter to President Medvedev, as well as the meeting between FM Sikorski and Secretary Clinton, have set aside for now Polish concerns that the U.S. will seek a grand bargain with Russia at the expense of the U.S.-Poland strategic relationship. Of continuing and perhaps increasing concern, however, is the slow pace of consultations between our two governments, especially at the heads level. There is a growing fear among Polish government elites that Poland has become an afterthought, or even a nuisance, in Washington circles, and this is hard to swallow for a country that considers itself a loyal ally and important contributor to U.S. strategic interests in greater Europe and Afghanistan. Much of this unease would dissipate with movement forward on Prime Minister Tusk's request to meet with the President in Washington in April. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) President Obama's clarifying remarks on the "secret letters" to Russian President Dmitry Medvedev struck a welcome chord with Polish leaders. FM Radoslaw Sikorski came away from his February 25 meeting with Secretary Clinton favorably impressed by her perspective on Russia, telling the press and us in private that the Secretary has "great geo-political instincts." Concerns over the U.S.-Russian dialogue are by no means dead, however. President Lech Kaczynski recently told Polish media that any U.S. decision to withdraw from missile defense (MD) to assuage Russia would "be an unfriendly gesture towards Poland." The DCM was grilled by Presidential Deputy Chief of Staff about whether the US could, in essence, keep from being out maneuvered by the Russians. Deputy Defense Minister Stanislaw Komorowski told acting U/S Mull in Washington in early March that "it is important to be 100 percent sure that Russia has no influence on sovereign decisions ... that would be a disaster for both of us."

¶3. (C) The GOP is anxious to engage the new administration at a high political level. Prime Minister Tusk was extremely pleased with his Munich meeting with the Vice President, and Foreign Minister Sikorski greatly appreciated his meeting with the Secretary. However, the GOP would like very much to hear back on its request for PM Tusk's visit to the White House. Privately, MFA officials have told us the Prime Minister will lose credibility if he does not get a Washington visit by the end of April. The Poles are aware of the President's intentions to meet with his hosts on the margins of the Informal US-EU Summit -- the Czech Republic -- where MD will clearly be on the agenda.

¶4. (C) We have also given Warsaw numerous assurances that the U.S. intends to move forward with our strategic relationship and will consult on MD, but Poles are keenly aware of the lack of actual consultations -- either on the Administration's thinking on MD or dialogue as envisioned in the August 2008 Declaration on Strategic Cooperation. They are being studiously patient as we sort through our policy options and put in place key personnel, but the Poles are increasingly frustrated about the absence of regular, expected contacts.

¶5. (C) Promised consultations are not inconsiderable. The consultative mechanisms established in the August 2008 Declaration of Strategic Cooperation are: a Strategic Dialogue (SD), Strategic Cooperation Consultative Group (SCCG), and High Level Defense Dialogue (HLDG). From the Polish perspective, it is more important that these bodies actually begin to meet (or least makes plans to do so) than to wait until logistical and protocol arrangements are determined, such as the rank of respective delegation leaders, frequency of meetings, or portfolio responsibilities. Indeed, the Poles now agree with us that these issues are more likely to be resolved during the meetings themselves than through formal exchanges beforehand.

¶6. (C) COMMENT. Although Polish leaders are thus far reassured that there will be no secret U.S.-Russian deal reached over Poland's head, they are increasingly nervous about their perceived lack of access to U.S. leaders, and worry that they are hearing about significant U.S. initiatives that concern Poland (like on Missile Defense) in the press and not from us directly. Our sense is that they are beginning to doubt our sincerity, and that is no doubt a confusing situation for a country that has consistently and strongly supported the U.S. END COMMENT.

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